United Nations E/CN.6/1998/NGO/6

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
30 January 1998

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-second session
2-13 March 1998
Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern

Statement submitted by the International Council on Social Welfare, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, and the International Federation of University Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

* * *

The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) marked a turning point for girls. In the Platform for Action, chapter I, section L, on the girl child expresses public and global acknowledgement by Governments of widespread discrimination against girls from the earliest stages of life, through their childhood and into adulthood. Two working groups on girls, established in 1993 in New York under the NGO Committee for UNICEF and in Geneva under the Committee on the Status of Women and representing 110 international and national non-governmental organizations in more than 100 countries, collaborated with United Nations Member States from Africa and Asia in support of that separate section on girls. Since the Conference, they have continued their efforts to ensure that governmental commitments are not empty words.

To aid in the review of section L at the forty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women and to gain a better perspective on progress in the field since the Conference, the working groups on girls distributed a questionnaire to nearly 1,000

* E/CN.6/1998/1

98-02515 (E) 100298 130298

non-governmental organizations worldwide. The resulting report, "Clearing a path for girls", is based on 246 responses, representing 86 countries.

The following recommendations, drawn from the surveys and based on section L, are directed to Governments, intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organizations, and to the Commission.

1. Education: Governments should set specific, time-bound goals and take appropriate actions to reduce the drop-out rate of girls from school, using a holistic approach to causes and solutions. This includes preventive programmes for girls at risk of early marriage, unplanned pregnancy and motherhood and all forms of labour, including work in their own household which interferes with their education. It also includes raising to 50 per cent the number of trained female teachers, improving safety in and on the way to school, improving the quality and relevance of schooling, through, *inter alia*, gender-sensitivity of teachers, curricula and textbooks, and creating special programmes to keep in school girls who are already pregnant or mothers. Special efforts must be made to reach out-of-school girls, with an emphasis on those who are the hardest to reach, such as members of ethnic minorities, the poorest of the poor, working girls, and girls with disabilities.

2. Economic exploitation/child labour: Governments and non-governmental organizations need to raise their own and the public's awareness about the scope, nature and impact of harmful work for girls, including work based on unequal gender roles, within their own families, which interferes with a girl's development. Gender-specific data regarding work must be collected, analysed and disseminated nationwide. Policies and strategies to enable families to provide for their children must be strengthened so that daughters do not need to be kept or removed from school in order to work. Special efforts must be made to develop legal protection and other special protective measures for adolescent girls working in areas not covered by existing legislation.

3. Data collection: To protect the rights of girls as children, to assess need and progress and to make distinctions between girls and women where different interventions are appropriate, special efforts must be made to collect, analyse and disseminate age and gender-disaggregated data in all relevant areas, including violence, child labour and HIV/AIDS. These data must be made readable and readily accessible and available to the broadest spectrum of population.

4. Participation: Governments and non-governmental organizations should incorporate in all relevant programmes the active participation of girls, including full access to information appropriate to their age and degree of maturity. This includes participation in the collection of information, design and implementation of programmes that directly affect them. Governments and non-governmental organizations can work with experienced youth non-governmental organizations to ensure that girls' participation is neither tokenistic nor inappropriate, but most effective. Children have very clear ideas about their own situations and how to improve them. As citizens, they have the right to be heard. Experience has also shown repeatedly that the more target groups are involved in the design and development of programmes affecting them, the more effective and sustainable those programmes are. This is as true for young girls and adolescents as for any other group.